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PUBLIC SERVICE THROUGH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

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There are nearly a thousand American cities with a population of over eight thousand. Each of these cities has a problem or a group of problems sufficient to warrant the present existence of at least one community organization. Many cities have been growing so rapidly that their range of problems covers everything from city planning and housing to a new form of city government, a new railroad freight and passenger terminal, a new franchise for a street railway or the financing of a new hotel. Occasionally—but rarely—one finds a city that is so dead that it has no housing problem or any other problem except deadness.

This means that there are at least one thousand cities in which there is a chamber of commerce or other civic organization which someone of ample training and high purpose may serve as community leader.¹

THE CHALLENGE OF A PROGRAM OF WORK

Being fully aware that many socially minded civic and social workers are inclined to look with disdain on the chamber of commerce and to doubt the possibility of constructive community service through the chamber of commerce, I venture to present the program of work of the Bridgeton, New Jersey, chamber of commerce as a sample. The statement of this program of work, as it appears in a report of one of the field secretaries of the American City Bureau, is printed herewith in full as follows:

PROGRAM OF WORK

INTRODUCTION

The following is the result of a thorough survey of the membership of the Bridgeton Chamber of Commerce, as obtained through a series of group

¹For an extended discussion of chamber of commerce ideals and methods see *Community Leadership—The New Profession*, by Lucius E. Wilson, vice-president of American City Bureau, Civic Press, New York, 1919.

meetings. They are an expression of the most urgent and obvious needs of the community at the present time. In the natural course of events, other projects will demand the consideration and decisive action of the Chamber.

Accomplishment of the projects included in these programs is dependent upon intelligent leadership on the part of officers and directors and enthusiastic co-operation on the part of the membership. The programs present a broad and comprehensive field for organized community endeavor, giving promise of actual accomplishment because derived from the united thought of the membership.

MAJOR PROGRAM OF WORK

A general demand already exists for the accomplishment of subjects placed under this heading. The Chamber of Commerce is, therefore, in a position to find immediate and wide support in its activities directed along these lines.

1. *Streets*.—Co-operate with City Council to secure improvement of streets and extension of the present pavement system.

2. *Education*.—Work for an improved public-school system, advocating the erection of a new high school and endeavoring to raise local educational standards.

3. *Good roads*.—Inaugurate movement to improve all highways leading into Bridgeton and endeavor to obtain hard surface road for trucking produce to big marketing centers.

4. *Health*.—Advocate the establishment of a garbage collection and disposal system, extension of the sewerage system and adequate enforcement of the sanitation laws.

5. *Transportation*.—Take steps to secure improvement of local train and trolley service.

6. *Housing*.—Encourage the building of homes as a solution of the housing situation.

7. *Comfort station*.—Provide public restroom and comfort station for the convenience of out-of-town people who make Bridgeton their trading center.

8. *Industrial development*.—Develop Bridgeton industrially by fostering the industries already located here and endeavoring to secure new ones.

9. *Publicity*.—Advertise the advantages of Bridgeton as a good place in which to live and work.

10. *Civic co-operation*.—Bring the general public to an understanding and appreciation of the aims and purposes of the Chamber of Commerce in an effort to unite the entire citizenship into an effective force for promoting the best interests of Bridgeton.

11. *Street lighting*.—Urge City Council to improve the present street lighting system.

12. *Community building*.—Undertake campaign to secure erection of a community building as a memorial to Bridgeton's ex-service men.

FORUM AND DISCUSSIONAL PROGRAM

Certain projects will require discussion and the winnings of a larger interest and support before they are undertaken, if efforts are to be successful.

A single meeting of the Membership Forum may indicate a degree of interest in a topic that will justify its immediate transference to the Major Program by the Board of Directors, and the appointment of a committee to begin work.

1. *Traffic regulations.*—Consider ways and means for the parking of automobiles and the elimination of traffic congestion.

2. *Agricultural development.*—Study the need of and develop plans for the assistance of farmers in the marketing of their products.

3. *Recreation.*—Focus public attention upon the necessity for adequately equipped and properly supervised parks, playgrounds, dance halls, theaters, and recreational centers where Bridgeton's young people can enjoy themselves under wholesome social surroundings.

4. *Fire prevention.*—Stimulate public interest in the care of property so as to eliminate the dangers of fire.

5. *City beautification.*—Promote a sense of pride in the appearance of the city, encouraging general participation in all "clean-up movements," and urging rigid enforcement of existing ordinances.

6. *Taxation.*—Arrange for the presentation of arguments favorable to a readjustment of taxable valuation and rate with a view to an increase in city and county income which will take care of needed improvements.

7. *City planning.*—Advance as a subject for early discussion a feasible plan which will provide for the future growth and development of the city.

8. *Retail trade.*—Awaken interest among merchants in a plan to improve store service, thereby strengthening the position of the city as a mercantile trading center.

SUPPLEMENTARY PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

The following subjects were presented, but do not appear to have sufficient support to warrant their being placed in the Major or Forum Programs. They may be introduced into the activities of the organization as public attention is attracted to them and as there is opportunity to carry them out.

Bring before the public the necessity for more adequate accommodations for visitors.

Unite with the other Chambers of Commerce in this district to secure a satisfactory proportion of state expenditures in South Jersey.

3. Urge City Council to enact an ordinance providing for milk inspection.
4. Co-operate with local ministers to increase interest in church activities.
5. Suggest to the banks the advisability of remaining open one evening a week instead of Saturday afternoon.

6. Establish a public forum for the discussion of important municipal questions.

7. Educate the people of the city to appreciate and support the Bridgeton Hospital.

8. Develop a sentiment favorable to the proper marking of streets and renumbering of houses.

9. Advocate erection of a municipal abattoir.

10. Discuss the possibilities of an improved form of city government.

11. Consider advisability of conducting a campaign to secure a Y.M.C.A.

INTERRELATION OF CIVICS AND COMMERCE

It has been a common sport for socially trained "civic" workers to assume a superior and self-righteous attitude toward the chamber of commerce and the chamber of commerce secretary. This pose is bred of a false philosophy of life which assumes that social and economic points of view are separate and distinct, and that, therefore, civics and commerce should be kept in thought-tight compartments.

Actual experience of the chamber of commerce secretary has served to demonstrate the oneness of the community problem. In secretarial literature it finds its expression in more than one paper on "The Interrelation of Civics and Commerce." Thus one finds that health and education, city planning and zoning, municipal administration, language and religion, politics and race, are intertwined with the business of making a living. A few illustrations quoted from a *Manual on City Planning Procedure*¹ will serve to illustrate more in detail:

Street traffic.—Is retail trade handicapped by the inadequacy of parking areas for automobiles, and by the consequent parking in front of store windows furnished for display? Does the trade avoid congested streets, and can shoppers approach store fronts by automobiles? Is the time of business men and workmen wasted by traffic delays caused by a congestion of street cars, horse-drawn vehicles, motor busses, and automobiles? Must trucks take "the long way around" in delivering industrial products or merchandise to railroad terminals? One could elaborate on the economic significance of the street traffic problem at length.

Zoning.—Real estate men everywhere are anxious for zoning, in the interests of their property or the property of their clients. Does it mean

¹ *Manual on City Planning Procedure*, by W. J. Donald, American City Bureau, 1920.

anything to mortgage companies that homes are protected from the encroachment of stores, from the shadows of apartments, and smoke and fumes of industry? Does the dry goods merchant want proximity to a garage or does the manufacturer of silks seek a chemical plant as his neighbor? Retail business men succeed best where business men "most do congregate." The retail "corner grocery" was ever a precarious financial adventure.

Grade crossings.—Consider the time lost to business by delays caused by grade crossings. Street cars, automobiles, pedestrians, trucks and delivery wagons are kept standing, and workmen and clerks are late for work. Life that can be valued only inadequately in money terms is destroyed by grade crossing accidents. Retail business districts are damaged and residential sections are blighted, until the obstruction is removed.

The principle suggested by these illustrations is one which the business man understands more or less in its concrete applications. It is a principle so well understood by a large percentage of chamber of commerce secretaries that their years are being devoted to teaching it to business men and to applying it in the solution of practical problems. Indeed the chamber of commerce secretary who thinks only in terms of one of the special social sciences will fail to solve the problems of the community, and sooner or later will destroy the chamber of commerce by undermining the only philosophy on which it can live. This statement is not only theory—it is also tried and proven practice.

THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SECRETARY

To understand the nature and scope of the program of work of a chamber of commerce is a challenge to the man who would serve the public. The opportunity of the chamber of commerce secretary invites men of the very best of training in the social sciences together with executive ability. One's knowledge of the sources of information is likely to be taxed to the utmost in the course of a week's work.

What level the profession has reached is indicated by a "Code of Ethics" prepared by a committee of experienced secretaries and adopted by the Students Association at the American City Bureau School for Chamber of Commerce Secretaries held at Madison, Wisconsin, in August of 1920. The "code," which might well be emulated by other professions, is as follows:

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IS A PROFESSION

I BELIEVE

That it offers an exceptional opportunity for constructive and substantial community service.

That as a member of this profession I should strive to improve my knowledge, widen my mental and spiritual horizon, and arrive at an understanding of the forces which move men to united action for the public weal.

That I should be at all times sincere, considerate, unprejudiced and fearless.

That my morals should be above reproach.

That I should apply myself to my work with a diligence and industry consistent with my physical and social efficiency.

That I should scrupulously administer the finances and affairs of my office in accordance with the best business practice.

That I should be honest and accurate in the dissemination of information regarding the community which I represent.

That I should hold in strictest confidence all information given in the same spirit.

That I should take no advantage for personal gain of private information received through the activities of the organization which I serve.

That a greater field for service rather than a higher salary should be the actuating motive in any future advancement in my profession.

That I should make no tender of my services to another community unless certain that the position desired is to be vacated.

That I should not accept a salary greater than commercial organization experience shows my organization is justified in paying.

That I should accept no remuneration for my services as a commercial organization executive apart from the regular salary for the position, except with the full approval of the Board of Directors.

That I should refrain from attempting to increase my salary by playing one organization against another.

That to make a change of position after only a few months of service or while in the midst of important incompleted activities is wrong in principle and detrimental to the profession.

That the ethics of my profession are best served by giving credit for accomplishments to the organization, rather than to the secretary.

That I should have the courage to admit my mistakes and thereon build for future success.

That I should so conduct myself and the affairs of my organization that others in the profession may find it wise and profitable to follow my example.

That I should be willing at all times, when requested, to assist my fellow secretaries in the solution of their problems and in securing a better understanding of the principles of the profession.

That my acceptance of a position as secretary should be founded upon implicit faith in my community, in my organization, in my profession and in myself.

That above all I should be loyal to my community and to my organization.

That I should exemplify the principles of unselfish community idealism and urge the responsibility and privilege of community service.

THE OPPORTUNITY

There is a constantly growing demand for well-trained men for chamber of commerce secretaryships. Moreover, standards of quality are constantly and rapidly rising.

The problems which the secretary must help to solve call for adequate training, executive ability, the impulse for public service, and a philosophy of society which sees the community problem as fundamentally one rather than diverse.